A number of services (charitable and statutory) work with carers to offer advice or more practical support, including:

**Voices of Carers in Lothian (VOCAL)**
Part of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers Network offering support (information, advice, training & counselling) to people caring for family and friends who are ill or have a disability.
Address: 8-13 Johnston Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2PW
Tel: 0131 622 6666 (Mon-Fri 9.30-5pm)

**Carers Service (Department for Work and Pensions)**
Offers information about entitlement to Carers Allowance.
Tel: 0845 6084321

**Information leaflets available in this series:**
If you are a carer, friend or family of someone with psychosis, you may also find it helpful to read the other leaflets in this series:
- What is psychosis?
- Psychological therapies and social interventions for psychosis
- Hearing voices
- Disturbing beliefs and thoughts
- Psychosis and recovery

September 2008

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**Knowing Someone with Psychosis**

Psychological Views on Psychosis:
a leaflet for anyone with psychosis or who knows of somebody with psychosis

One of a series of leaflets about psychosis written by psychologists for service-users, carers and professionals within NHS Lothian
Psychosis can be distressing for the person who is experiencing these problems and for those who care for them. The aim of this leaflet is to help carers understand about psychosis and what they can expect whilst the person they care for is having difficulties.

The term psychosis is used to describe a range of experiences someone can have, such as having paranoid thoughts or hearing voices. These experiences are surprisingly common, even among people who don’t use mental health services, but sometimes they can be so extreme that they seem to take over the person’s life. The experiences, even if bizarre, seem absolutely real to the person. In such cases doctors may diagnose these experiences and symptoms as schizophrenia, schizo-affective disorder or bipolar disorder.

One in 100 people in the general population has a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Adolescence or early adulthood are common stages for these problems to begin. However, many people who have a psychotic episode do recover and for many it does not have to be a life-long problem.

The support you are able to give somebody with psychosis will help them in their recovery. However, caring for somebody who is unwell can be a very stressful experience. It can put strains on your relationship and affect other areas of your life.

So, it is important that you look after yourself and your own needs as well as possible. This may involve setting aside regular time for yourself or talking to somebody, such as a friend or your GP, about how you are managing to cope.

You can also talk to the mental health professionals about what help may be available. Psychological interventions may be helpful for the individual and family members. These include Family Therapy which focuses on the ‘here and now’ to improve communication and minimise stress for every within the family when someone is unwell.
What if I know someone I think has psychosis?

If possible, talk to the person about your concerns and the changes you have noticed in them. Encourage the person to speak to their GP about their worries and your concerns. This can often be difficult, particularly if the person is not aware themselves of the changes that are happening to them or if they believe everyone else is wrong in their concerns. Remember, the experience of psychosis seems very real. Frequently, the person does not think they have a mental health problem but believes that they really are, for example, the victim of a conspiracy.

They may need help to reduce stress in their life or support to help them attend appointments with a mental health professional. It is important that both they and you keep as normal a routine as possible—this includes both of you having time to do the things you find enjoyable.

They may also need to have regular social contact and encouragement to structure their day by maintaining the activities they enjoy.

Don’t be afraid to speak to the health professionals involved in the person’s care. Communication is important. Your perspective will be very helpful to the assessment and care planning process. The professional may not be able to talk in detail about your family members’ or friends’ problems due to responsibilities of confidentiality. This depends on the person’s wishes. However, the professionals can give you general information about the nature of their difficulties.

Here are some examples of the most common experiences of psychosis:

Changes to Thoughts
- Hearing, seeing, smelling or feeling things that others do not
- Having unusual thoughts or beliefs which may seem unrealistic or strange to other people
- Problems thinking clearly (including problems with attention, concentration and memory).

Changes to Feelings
- Feeling anxious
- Feeling depressed or unmotivated
- Rapidly changing moods.

Changes to Behaviour
- Unusual behaviour such as talking to oneself
- Disrupted sleeping pattern e.g. turning night into day.
Causes of psychosis

As yet there has been no specific cause identified for psychosis. It seems more likely that different psychological, social and biological factors interact to influence the development of psychosis. These factors seem to be important to different degrees for different individuals. It seems that anybody could experience psychosis under certain circumstances.

Here are a few of the possible contributors:

Psychological
Stress - under enough stress it seems that anybody can develop psychosis. For some people smaller amounts of stress can trigger an episode of psychosis than for others. Stress can arise from daily hassles or unusual circumstances, and can be the result of a person’s perceived inability to cope with the demands on them.

Social
Life events - psychosis often seems to follow a major event in someone’s life, particularly if the event is distressing or traumatic.

Biological
Alcohol or drugs – alcohol and illicit drugs (e.g. cannabis) may make people vulnerable to psychosis and may trigger a psychotic episode.

Genetics - there is also evidence to suggest that for some people genetic factors may contribute to their risk of developing psychosis.

Course of psychosis

The early stages of psychosis can be confusing for both the person and those who care for them. It can be a time of great change when the person may behave in ways that are very out of character or become distressed by their experiences.

Many people have long episodes of feeling well but then have periods of relapse. It is important for the person to get help as soon as possible, as early treatment is thought to improve recovery rates.

Treatment of psychosis

Various treatments are available which have been shown to improve a person’s recovery from psychosis. These include psychological, medical and social approaches which can be used individually or together. All these treatments can be accessed through the NHS following an assessment by a GP or a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or community psychiatric nurse.

Further information on psychological and social interventions for psychosis, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Family Therapy, is provided in another leaflet within this series titled ‘Psychological Therapies and Social Interventions for Psychosis’.